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SUBJECT: SHADOWY NGO'S TERRORIST TIES WORRY KERALA OBSERVERS

CLASSIFIED BY PRINCIPAL OFFICER ANDREW SINKIN FOR REASONS

1.4(B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The National Development Front (NDF), a shadowy, self-described human rights organization is causing alarm in north Kerala. A wide range of interlocutors alleged that the group has connections to the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and a history of violent activity. One contact suggested that NDF has terrorist training camps in the mountains of north Kerala; another posited that the group receives funding from abroad. Although the training camp allegation seems far-fetched, post believes the NDF warrants continued observation as a potential terrorist organization located in an increasingly radicalized Muslim enclave. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a September 22 - 25 visit to Kozhikode (Calicut), increasing influence of the National Development Front (NDF), a self-described non-political human rights organization, which is based in north Kerala. The NDF ostensibly exists to defend the rights of the region's substantial Muslim population. But our interlocutors described the NDF as a shadowy organization with connections to the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). Although there was no consensus on the NDF's intentions, many believe it to be a terrorist organization.

Establishment Muslim leaders sound the alarm on NDF

¶3. (C) MK Muneer, a prominent member of the mainstream Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), expressed the gravest concerns about NDF. Muneer told post that NDF members "are all ex-SIMI." He said "they claim to be secular" but that is just a "front." Muneer said that the NDF has pursued a strategy of appearing to be a social services organization while having its members infiltrate the state's political parties, including the IUML, the Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM), and the Congress party. As a result, "nobody wants to investigate" what the NDF is really doing according to Muneer. Muneer alleged that the NDF has "training camps" in the mountainous Wayanad district. But when we asked for further details, he refused to elaborate and only said "what are they doing there?" (Note: Wayanad district is a mountainous, rural district known for its wildlife and coffee and spice plantations. The district is an increasingly popular tourist destination. End note.)

¶4. (C) Madavoor Hussain, a moderate Islamic scholar and educator, agreed that the NDF's growing prominence is a legitimate concern but feels that the government can keep a handle on them. Hussain said NDF is driven by "dangerous thinking, radical thinking." Nonetheless, he said, they are "mostly talk." Hussain also referred to alleged NDF training camps, but dismissed the possibility such camps exist. He said he does not think any group could get away with such activities in India, especially a Muslim organization. He cited

his own experience with the Intelligence Bureau (IB). "Every time I meet with the U.S. Consulate, the IB people come and ask me questions. They have details; know where I was," he said. Hussain then asked, rhetorically, how NDF could have terrorist training camps in Kerala if the IB can track his movements so closely.

Journalists say NDF is SIMI front group

15. (C) We found media contacts also preoccupied with the NDF. Both Madhavan Nair, Kozhikode correspondent for The Hindu, and K. Aboobacker, the Associate Editor of a Kozhikode Malayalam-language newspaper described the NDF as "terrorists." Nair called the NDF "a very dangerous group. They are anti-national. They want the total Islamicization of India." Both Nair and Aboobacker agreed with the IUML's Muneer that NDF is largely made up of ex-SIMI members that have infiltrated mainstream political parties. Nair went a step further, saying that NDF is a reconstituted SIMI front group. Both pointed out that the NDF has grown in size quite quickly. According to Nair, NDF has grown especially quickly on university campuses. He mentioned that they even managed to beat out the CPM's student wing, the Student Federation of India (SFI), in elections at a local medical school.

NDF uses violence, has outside connections

16. (C) Nair said the NDF is a violent organization, citing instances of NDF members allegedly killing local political opponents. (Note: The NDF has been accused of involvement in numerous violent attacks, including attacks on politicians and Hindu pilgrims. The most notorious incident was the 2004 massacre of eight Hindus at Kozhikode's Marad beach. The NDF, for its part, publicly denies that its members engage in violence. End note.) Nair testified in court in connection with one such case, and told us that his experience in

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the litigation has led him to believe that the NDF is funded from abroad. He said the NDF-connected defendants were represented by one of the most prominent, and expensive, local defense lawyers. Nair asked "where does this money come from? It has to be from outside." Nair further supported his argument that the NDF has overseas links by noting that the group can afford to print its own daily newspaper, without paid advertising.

Police worry about terrorism, but not NDF

17. (C) Kozhikode City Police Commissioner Anup John bluntly admitted that terrorism is one of his primary concerns. Many suspected terrorists picked up all over India "seem to have a connection to Kozhikode," he said. But he denied any concerns about the NDF. "Within two years," John said, "the NDF is become a political party with all the moderating effects that brings."

Comment: Keep an eye on NDF

18. (C) Comment: One thing is abundantly clear: the NDF is worrying a lot of people in Kozhikode. The general consensus -- from Hindu and Muslim interlocutors alike -- is that NDF has strong links to the banned SIMI. The group is quite secretive, which is not entirely unreasonable given the heavy hand of the Indian police and intelligence services, especially towards Muslim groups. But the group's claim to be an apolitical human rights organization rings hollow in the face of credible allegations from a broad spectrum of people that it engages in targeted political violence. We are inclined to attribute the most serious allegation, Muneer's claim that NDF is running terrorist training camps in Wayanad, to his concern that his IUML is losing its grip on Muslim voters in north Kerala. But regardless, the NDF bears watching as a possible terrorist group in the heart of one of India's increasingly radicalized Muslim enclaves. End comment.
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